

Era ends with closing of Hangar AO

By George Diller

An era ended on Jan. 29 when 35 veteran spacecraft and expendable vehicle launch team members of KSC and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory gathered at NASA Spacecraft Hangar AO to recognize and remember NASA's accomplishments in that facility.

"We are faced with budget cuts, downsizing and streamlining and this is one of the victims of that process," said John Conway, director of KSC Payload Operations. "Also, we are no longer flying the number of scientific payloads we once did," he added.

Payload processing has ended at Hangar AO, one of the most historical processing facilities at Cape Canaveral and KSC. Under budget pressure to close facilities and unable to find or justify the amount of money required to replace an air handling system for its Class 100,000 clean room, the decision was made to turn Hangar AO over to someone else. While no firm decisions have been made, it appears that the hangar may take on a new role in the current space era under the stewardship of the U.S. Air Force or a commercial launch services company.

Pioneer 10 and 11, Surveyor, Lunar Orbiter, Mariner, Pioneer Venus, Ulysses, Viking and Voyager are some of the most notable payloads to pass through the hangar's doors.

The first payload to be processed there was Mariner 4, a mission to orbit Mars launched on an Atlas Agena rocket in November 1964. The last was the X-ray Timing Explorer launched aboard a Delta II rocket in December 1995.

Bill Fletcher, in charge of KSC payload processing facilities for most of the Hangar AO era, recalls that the hangar was one of the most versatile with a clean room capable of handling as many as five similar payloads at a time. It also had space for the associated ground checkout stations and up to 72 payload personnel.

The hangar also held a Mission Control Center on the second floor from which the progress of a spacecraft could be followed after leaving Earth orbit.

"It was a party to all planetary missions," recalls Skip Mackey, manager of telemetry for expendable vehicles at KSC.

At the commemorative ceremony, team members enjoyed a cake decorated with a black border and flanked with black



A TRUCK brings NASA's X-ray Timing Explorer (XTE) to Hangar AO for approximately two months of checkout, testing and launch preparations in May 1995. The payload was the last processed in the facility.

balloons and reminisced about the high profile days which Hangar AO enjoyed.

Tony Spear, now a JPL mission manager for an upcoming Mars flight, recalled having his picture taken with former President Lyndon Johnson at Hangar AO in 1964. The JPL facility manager at the time, Hank Levy, insisted that "LBJ is not exempted from donning clean room attire before entering the high bay."

Dave Bragdon, a member of the KSC spacecraft team affectionately called "F-Troop," recalls the changes to the hangar when General James Abrahamson, NASA associate administrator for Space Flight in the

mid-1980s, directed an upgrade to the facility, making it one of the most flexible and desirable facilities on the Cape.

The upgrade also resulted in a change to an off-yellow color from what had become the almost legendary two-tone green.

KSC's Terry Terhune, also a spacecraft veteran of the 1960s and 70s, closed the commemorative ceremony with one of his famous limericks:

"Farewell to the building called AO;

It processed planetaries so long ago;

Here before each mission was given permission

to launch in an era only few of us know."

Management changes announced at NASA centers

NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin recently announced top management changes at several NASA centers.

Dr. J. Wayne Little was named the new director of the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, AL. Little will assume the post Feb. 3. He currently serves as the associate administrator for the Office of Space Flight and he will replace G. Porter Bridwell who announced Jan. 11 he is retiring from NASA after 34 years of service.

"Dr. Little has the necessary managerial and technical experience to lead Marshall into the

21st century," Goldin said. As the head of the Office of Space Flight, Little directed both the Space Shuttle and Space Station programs for NASA. Most recently he has been leading the effort to consolidate Shuttle operations under a single prime contractor.

George Abbey has been named the new director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX. Goldin said that Abbey "has distinguished himself as an innovator and pioneer at all levels of agency management."

Abbey had been serving as acting director at Johnson since August 1995. He joined NASA

in 1967 as technical assistant to the manager, Apollo Spacecraft Program. He was appointed deputy associate administrator for Space Flight at NASA Headquarters in March 1988 and ascended to the position of senior director for Civil Service Policy for the National Space Council, Executive Office of the President in July 1991.

Dr. Henry McDonald will take over as director of the Ames Research Center in Mountain View, CA, effective March 4.

"Dr. McDonald brings to Ames strong research experience in information systems applications, computational phys-

ics and aerodynamics, combined with technical and managerial skills that will reinforce NASA's commitment to aeronautical and space research for a stronger America," Goldin said.

McDonald was formerly the assistant director of computational sciences and professor of mechanical engineering at the Applied Research Laboratory, Pennsylvania State University. He was also founder, president and chief executive officer of Scientific Research Associates, Inc., Glastonbury, CT, where he was responsible for manage-

(See CHANGES, Page 5)